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More Than a Game: The Legacy of Black Baseball

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In May of 2005, I will graduate from the University of Kentucky Magna Cum Laude, with a Bachelor's of Arts with honors in History. Since I arrived at UK three years ago, I have remained on the Dean's List. I am a member of Phi Alpha Theta and the National Society of Collegiate Scholars. In January of 2005, the History department awarded me the Holman Hamilton fellowship.

My thesis, *More Than a Game: The Legacy of Black Baseball*, stems from my life-long interest in sports and civil rights. As a former athlete at Webster University, I understand the time and work ethic it requires to be a successful athlete. I also understand what it means to athletes when society recognizes and rewards them for their struggles and triumphs. I did not learn about the Negro Leagues until my sophomore year at the University of Kentucky, and my disdain at my own lack of awareness and knowledge is what inspired me to write my senior thesis on the Negro Leagues.

In doing my research, I had ample assistance from William Marshall, the Curator of Manuscripts at Margaret I. King Library. He graciously granted me access to his own interviews with former Negro League owners and players. His guidance and assistance throughout my research made this project the most beneficial and important educational experience of my college career.



Mentor:

William Marshall

Curator of Manuscripts at the Margaret I. King Library

In her essay on "The Legacy of Black Baseball," Tara Moriarty took a fresh approach to the integration of baseball by Jackie Robinson in 1946 when she explored and paid homage to the presence of the Negro Leagues at a critical time in American history. The presence of the Negro Leagues she argued not only served the African-American community well as an entertainment business, it was "a rallying point for the Civil Rights Movement," and it provided a corps of skilled black players who could not only compete in organized professional baseball, but who could also excel.

Ms. Moriarty's essay is one of the finest I have seen an undergraduate produce. Her work is well-crafted, organized, and tightly written. Her themes are logically-argued and her conclusions are particularly strong. Moreover, she skillfully intertwined secondary and primary sources throughout the essay. As can be ascertained by examining her sources, it is obvious that she depended heavily on primary source materials (oral history interviews, personal papers, and African-American newspapers). Finally, reading this essay one cannot help but notice the enthusiasm Tara possesses for history.

More Than a Game: The Legacy of Black Baseball

Abstract

Out of a segregated and persecuted black society, the Negro Leagues arose to provide a form of business, entertainment, and charity. The leagues served as a form of uplift within the race and as a tool to bring blacks together within their communities. In 1945, with the signing of Jackie Robinson to Montreal, baseball became a vehicle for integration. While Robinson broke the color line in professional baseball, he simultaneously broke the Negro Leagues. Black fans abandoned black baseball and turned to the Major Leagues to watch Robinson. Although the integration of baseball was the first major victory for integration in the United States, it was also the end of an era for the Negro Leagues, an institution that provided unity and pride within America's black communities. From both primary and secondary sources, it is obvious that the Negro Leagues played a vital role in black communities throughout the first half of the twentieth century. It is also apparent that there are conflicting opinions with regard to the integration of baseball, and whether it was a positive or negative event in black history. This essay examines the great paradox of the integration of baseball.

Introduction

In 1938, when asked who the best player in baseball history was, a white St. Louis sportswriter answered, "If you mean in organized baseball my answer would be Babe Ruth; but if you mean in all baseball, organized or unorganized, the answer would have to be a colored man named John Henry Lloyd." (Peterson, 1992, p. 79) Lloyd, along with many other black baseball players, was a victim of the so-called 'gentleman's agreement' that forbade the hiring of blacks to major league baseball teams. Many times over these players heard comments to the tune of, "If only you were white. Mrs. Grace Comiskey, who owned the White Sox, would watch 'Sug' Cornelius pitch for the Chicago American Giants and lament, 'Oh, if you were a white boy, what you'd be worth to my club.'" (Tygiel, 1997, p. 32) From the time of Jim Crow to the shattering of the color barrier by Jackie Robinson, black athletes had

to perform outside of the white dominated arenas of baseball.

To some extent, all of the above is true, but if you were to ask John Henry Lloyd if he was a victim or if he was born before his time, he would reply:

I do not consider that I was born at the wrong time. I felt it was the right time, for I had a chance to prove the ability of our race in this sport, and because many of us did our very best to uphold the traditions of the game and of the world of sport, we have given the Negro a greater opportunity now to be accepted into the major leagues with other Americans. (Peterson, 1992, p. 79)

Did Mr. Lloyd have a real opportunity to 'prove our race in this sport' of baseball? To say that blacks could not play organized baseball is not entirely correct. They played in organized leagues, which the white majority refused to recognize. Black baseball was "hidden or at least obscured from the view of whites," and "like black newspapers, black universities, and black music, offered a vital, vibrant and often innovative alternative for those excluded from the dominant American institutions." (Peterson, 1992, p. 16) The story of black baseball (the Negro Leagues) is a prime example of how African Americans overcame the obstacles of segregation and succeeded to such an extent that the vast white majority could no longer ignore them. Baseball provided a vital cultural entity and an illustration of the strength and endurance of an oppressed people.

Thousands of people "turned out to view the curious spectacle of a Negro playing with whites. 'Every good play by him was loudly applauded,' *Sporting Life* said." (Peterson, 1992, p. 23) This comment, although very similar to those made in the year 1946, does not refer to Jackie Robinson, but rather to a man named Moses Fleetwood Walker. According to *The Encyclopedia of Negro League Baseball*, Walker, in 1883, was the first professional black baseball player on a white major league team. (Loverro, 2003, p. 301) The National Association of Baseball Players, in 1867, drew the first-ever color line in baseball. In 1872, the National Association of Professional Baseball Players continued the tradition of the color line by creating the 'gentleman's agreement.' From 1883 to 1889, however, there were a handful of black athletes playing professional white baseball. In 1889, they drove out Walker, the sole surviving black baseball player, and it would not be until 1947 that another black ballplayer would inhabit the Major Leagues. (Peterson, 1992, pp. 16-24, 44)



Andrew (Rube) Foster as player and owner.

Early Leagues

In 1920, Rube Foster founded the first successful Negro National League (NNL), something Beauregard Moseley had attempted to do in 1910. Moseley "urged a self help philosophy to stabilize the black man's deteriorating position in American society." (Rogosin, 1983, p. 10) Foster had the leadership and know-how that Moseley lacked to make the leagues succeed. The Eastern Colored League (ECL) was formed in 1923 and, in 1924, the champions of the ECL and the NNL played the first Negro World Series. Both leagues suffered during the Great Depression and, by 1932, both leagues had folded, making it the first time since 1920 that no major Negro league was functioning.

In 1933, the second Negro National League was established and, in 1937, the Negro American League (NAL) emerged. The Charter members of the second NNL were successful "numbers" bankers. (Overmyer, 1998, p. 10) Rogosin describes them as "the small-time, and not-so-small-time, gangsters of the black ghettos. [They] were almost the only blacks with the money and inclination necessary to subsidize black baseball." (Rogosin, 1983, p. 17) With the money these men brought to the table, only one, Gus Greenlee, was able to build a stadium. Therefore, these teams relied on white booking agents who "for their compulsory services demanded 40 percent of the gross receipts." (Tygiel, 1997, p. 23) Outside of the league games, the Negro teams depended on barnstorming games during, before, and after the regular season to make the money necessary to stay in operation. Born in a time of prejudice, these leagues grew out of an impoverished people into a two million dollar black empire.

There were four major components to the Negro Leagues' financial survival: regular season games, barnstorming games, the Negro League World Series, and the annual East-West All-Star game. Newark Eagles owner, Effa Manley, explained that "Our league schedule was mainly weekends and one game in the middle of the week. The regular league was



Roy Campanella

started and did not have a steady fan base to buy tickets, then it is possible the Manleys would not have been able to afford the stadium. Even with such an arrangement, barnstorming regularly throughout the year was a continuous necessity for Negro League teams.

Barnstorming had a long tradition in black baseball. Without a proper league established for African Americans to showcase their talent, teams would often form and travel around the country playing wherever there was a team ready to play and a crowd ready to pay. The spectacle of black men playing baseball, sometimes in parts of the country where fans had never even seen an African American, drew a crowd and a quick dollar for these Negro League teams. Roy Campanella reflected, "Rarely were we in the same city two days in a row. Mostly we played by day and traveled by night; sometimes we played both day and night and usually in two different cities." (Tygiel, 1997, p. 17) In fact, the Kansas City Monarchs developed the night game in 1930, as a way to maximize their appearances. (Peterson, 1992, p. 124). University of Kentucky baseball historian William Marshall recounted that during the 1930s and 1940s "an additional 200 exhibition or barnstorming games, played on a daily basis with local or all star teams, filled in the rest of the schedule." (Marshall, 1999, p. 122) Barnstorming, which put immense pressure on the ballplayers physically, was a financial necessity.

All-Star Games

The highlight of the year was, of course, the annual East-West All-Star game, which always drew more attention and money than the Negro World Series. "The black population was unable to support a seven- or nine-game series over a short period. The black population was not big enough, the black fan's discretionary income was not large enough, nor his leisure time extensive enough." (Rogosin, 1983, p. 26) Negro league teams were dependent on the revenue from the large crowds attending the annual East-West game held at Comiskey Park. "Many teams depended upon their share of the East West game receipts to pay off their players and give them a small reserve with which to open the next season." (Peterson, 1992, p. 100) The very first East-West game drew

then sixty games." The Manleys in Newark had a nice arrangement. "The Dodger people were very nice about renting the stadium place on no flat rate," Manley recalled, "just a percentage of whatever we drew in at the gate." (Manley Interview, 1977) She was correct in this observation. If the Dodgers had demanded a flat rate when the team first

an attendance of twenty thousand fans and later, when the event was in its prime, it attracted over fifty thousand fans annually. Fifty-one thousand, seven hundred and twenty-three fans attended the 1943 East-West game; making it the "biggest crowd ever to attend a Negro sports event up to that time." (Peterson, 1992, p. 100) This game generated needed money for the teams, brought fans together, and claimed both black and white media attention.

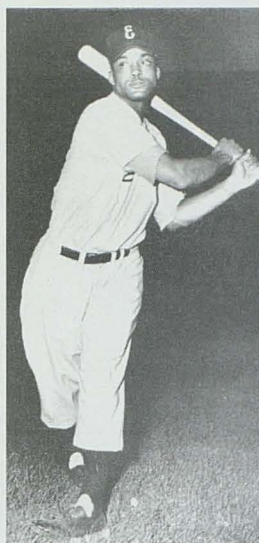
Gus Greenlee, owner of the Pittsburgh Crawfords, started the annual All-Star game in 1934. The genius behind his plan was to allow the fans to decide which players would represent their league. Black newspapers, like the *Chicago Defender* and the *Pittsburgh Courier* that covered the leagues' games, would carry ballots for the All Star games so the fans could vote for the players whom they wanted to see play in the game.

Being able to vote and having their voices recognized was very important to African Americans during this time in history. (Loverro, 2003, p. 88) This game was more than just an exhibition, according to Negro Leaguer Buck O'Neil, "for black folks, the East-West Game was a matter of racial pride." (Loverro, 2003, p. 88) Playing in a white owned stadium, with white media and baseball fans looking on as the game progressed, gave black athletes a chance to display their talent to the rest of baseball. It was a time when no one could deny the ability of black athletes. Moreover, baseball gave black audiences a reason to come together to witness their abilities as a race and to celebrate their successes in a world that tried so hard to oppress them.

Ball Players' Lives

The life of a Negro leaguer was one of physical hardships. According to Effa Manley, her team always had at least sixteen and sometimes eighteen players on the roster. (Manley Interview, 1977) Monte Irvin, who played for the Manleys, and later for the New York Giants in the National League, described his typical week of play as follows:

We would play four or five games a week. Sometimes on a weekend, we would play three games or four games. We'd have a doubleheader during the day, and say we're playing in Newark, now they play a doubleheader at Rupert Stadium, we would leave and then say play a night game in Belmar or a night game in Trenton or a night game in Asbury Park, to take advantage of all the people on vacation down at the shore. (Irvin Interview, 1977)



Monte Irvin

The excessive number of games and constant travel created great physical demands on the players. In addition, they also had to cope with Jim Crow America.

"Most hotels were segregated. Areas where no facilities for blacks existed, ballplayers slept on the bus or outside at the ball park. The average black hotel lacked appeal (bedbugs)." (Tygiel, 1997, p. 18) Later Jackie Robinson, in an article that appeared in *Ebony*, would indict the Negro Leagues for their poor traveling provisions. However, Mrs. Manley truthfully responded to this charge when she declared, "Until Congress makes statutory changes on race prejudice in hotels, I'm afraid there's little we can do to better such accommodations." (Tygiel, 1997, p. 18) Travel across America was difficult and uncommon for African Americans during the 1940s. Quincy Troupe proclaimed, "Baseball

opened doors for me which would have been barred. It revealed new vistas that were more educational than a doctor's degree. Because of this great national game, I have lived a life comparable to the wealthiest man in the United States." (Tygiel, 1997, p. 28) These Negro Leagues offered a lot to young black men in America. Roy Campanella once wrote, "We had players who came from slum neighborhoods and playing ball was a way to beat that, to move on to something better." (Tygiel, 1997, p. 28) It might have been long hours and hard work, but it offered them a chance to see the country and earn more money than they would have at any other job available for them.

Monte Irvin told Marshall, "There was constant travel, but [it was] very, very enjoyable because we were making more money than we could have made if we were a janitor or in, say, some other kind of maintenance work." (Irvin Interview, 1977) A top salary for these ballplayers would have been around five hundred dollars a month. It was "a time when millions of Americans were unemployed and when a good wage for anyone, white or black, was \$20 a week, this was big money." (Peterson, 1992, p. 121) Irvin elaborated, "At the time, money was very important because I think we got like maybe a dollar a day for meal money and if you made it fifty dollars a week playing ball, you're still making twice as much as everybody else was." (Irvin Interview, 1977) As a direct result of the lucrative side of their profession, there was a lot of pressure to perform. Players coped with the hardships because there were always other players ready to take their places and their salaries. Even beyond the issue of money, most men survived the long and harsh environment of the Negro Leagues simply out of pure love for the game. Roy Campanella recalled, "On more than one occasion I caught four games in a single day for the Baltimore Elite Giants. I didn't know what it meant to be tired as long as I got my turn at bat." (Rogosin, 1983, p. 23) Perhaps Buddy Burbage best summed it up, "You loved baseball. Then you played it, and talked about it, and you dreamed it." (Rogosin, 1983, p. 76) These men kept the love for baseball alive in black America through the dark days of Jim Crow.

When Rube Foster first founded the original league, his goal was "to create a profession that would equal the earning capacity of any other

profession." (Rogosin, 1983, p. 74) Establishing a legitimate black business was the ultimate achievement. "In 1940 there were fewer than four thousand black doctors in the entire nation. Businessmen were also few. Only ministers and school teachers contributed any numbers to a professional class." (Rogosin, 1983, p. 91) There were very few true role models for blacks in the United States. African Americans faced a bleak future in a land that taught them to be ashamed of their skin. Major League baseball inspired blacks as much as it did whites. The first time Monte Irvin laid eyes on a real Major League baseball player he said, "if this is what baseball can do to a person, then I want to become a baseball player." (Irvin Interview, 1977) Black society desperately needed role models similar to those provided by the Major Leagues.

Each Negro League team owner held his or her players to certain standards on and off the field. "The Chicago American Giants under Foster's leadership had not only a dress code, which conformed to Foster's essentially conservative taste, but also a curfew." (Rogosin, 1983, p. 68) Presentation was very important and, for this reason, players learned everything from how to dress to proper "hotel behavior." (Rogosin, 1983, p. 69) Even on the field, the players were dressed to a tee. Effa Manley often boasted, "We only used the finest equipment. Our uniforms were manufactured by the same people that made them for the majors." (Manley Interview, 1977) Max Manning explained how particular Mrs. Manley was when he wrote:

She was very meticulous about how the team looked. She didn't want to see you sloppy. If your shoes were muddy she'd remark about it. When we went on the road, there was always a package of clean uniforms. When we came back, our white uniforms were as clean as can be. (Overmyer, 1998, p. 101)

Presentation has always been of great importance when running a business. The Negro Leagues were no different. They needed to appeal to their audiences in a way that demanded respect and acknowledgment.

Segregation and Civil Rights

"Black people, crushed by segregation, desperately needed models to emulate; and they required men and women who cast large shadows, large enough to make known the truth of black talent." (Rogosin, 1983, p. 68) Most of the big names involved with the Negro Leagues were already activists or played prominent roles in their black communities prior to their involvement with the Leagues. Rube Foster, the

father of black baseball, noted that the underlying purpose of his league was to "keep colored baseball from the control of whites. He also said he wanted to do something concrete for the loyalty of the race." (Loverro, 2003, p. 99) After having experienced first hand the prejudices against blacks in life and in baseball, he knew he had to do something that would make evident the capability and potential of his race. He visualized an independent league out of the reach of white men and the prejudices that oppressed black people. The Negro Leagues were never completely out of reach of the white baseball owners, however. These owners would gain revenue from the Negro Leagues by renting out their stadiums for Negro League games.

Even before the "numbers" bankers came together and organized the second Negro National League, they were dominant figures in their communities. Although gaming was illegal:

In black city neighborhoods it constituted a black-run investment business. Urban blacks in those times had limited legitimate options; the white-run banking and financial community had little or no interest in bankrolling persons from the ghettos, who generally had low incomes and little collateral. Black numbers barons became providers of business loans unavailable from the banking community, as well as philanthropists supporting charities and churches. (Overmyer, 1998, pp. 9-10)

In a way, these were the black entrepreneurs who would never have the opportunity to make a legitimate career in a white run world, or at least not until the organization of the Negro Leagues, and even then these men continued to give back to their communities.

One of the most interesting and influential owners, or co-owner, was Effa Manley. She was a long-time civil rights advocate before she became so strongly connected to baseball. By 1936 she had been an officer of the Edgecombe Sanitarium Renaissance Committee, the Children's Camp Committee of New York, and the secretary of the Citizens' League for Fair Play. (Overmyer, 1998, p. 15) The Citizen's League for Fair Play, according to Rogosin, was responsible for "desegregating Harlem department store employment in the thirties. 'Don't buy where you can't work' was the slogan which broke Blumberg's Department Store in 1934, and Effa was the first one on that picket line." (Rogosin, 1983, p. 109) After the Manleys acquired the Newark Eagles, Effa continued her passionate cam-

paign for civil rights. The Manleys produced a winning ball club in Newark, but had they not won one single game they would still be renowned for all the charitable work they did for the community.

As a member of the National Association of the Advancement of Colored People, and one-time treasurer of the New Jersey NAACP, Effa Manley used "game days to raise funds for the organization. The New Jersey Afro American newspaper recorded a collection of \$143 by the



Abe and Effa Manley

local NAACP Youth Council at a May 16, 1943, game. On opening day in 1946, volunteers, with NAACP banners draped from their shoulders, canvassed 8,500 fans there for the Eagles game with the Philadelphia Stars." (Overmyer, 1998, p. 59) One of Effa's most memorable events at the ballpark was the 'Stop Lynching' campaign. She "decorated her usherettes with sashes that read 'Stop Lynching,' she sent them gladhanding through the crowd, fund raising for the number-one civil rights issue of the day." (Rogosin, 1983, p. 94) Manley also invited the 372nd Regiment, the nation's top black military unit, to an Eagle's game to honor them for their services to the country. In addition, she donated the use of her team bus to transport black entertainers to put on special performances for the black troops. (Rogosin, 1983, p. 94) Negro League baseball served as more than just entertainment. It found ways to recognize black accomplishments on and off the field and serve its community.

The Negro League teams also played unifying roles in the communities where they were located. "On August 20, 1940, the Eagles played the first of periodical benefit games to raise money for new medical equipment." (Overmyer, 1998, p. 59-61) The medical equipment was for Booker T. Washington Community Hospital, a recent establishment in Newark, New Jersey. Before its existence "blacks had been barred from the medical professions." (Overmyer, 1998, p. 59) The team also played benefit games for the Elks lodges and used games to honor special individual achievements in the black community. The Manleys' favorite connection to the Newark community was through the youth. The Eagles had a "Knothole Gang" that allowed free admission to children. They also sponsored a local youth team called the Newark Cubs. They were the only black team in the Newark Youth League. (Overmyer, 1998, p. 61) The list of charitable events goes on and on, and similar activities were going on in other black ball clubs and stadiums.

Baseball was a big event for black communities. On opening day there would be marching bands, drum majorettes, and parades featuring black dignitaries. It was even common for white politicians to make appearances at the League's opener as a publicity stunt seeking black votes. (Rogosin, 1983, p. 94) Beauty contests also attracted community support. In Kansas City, "Mary Jo Wheeler, crowned Miss Monarch in 1940, was selected from twenty Kansas City beauties. A merchant's sponsorship was required to enter the Miss Monarch Contest; Miss Wheeler's five-dollar entry fee was paid by Gold Crown Liquors." (Rogosin, 1983, p. 93) The fact that a liquor store served as her merchant sponsor illustrates the limited kind of legitimate, black-owned businesses available to provide such sponsorships. Other regional promotions by Negro League teams included: Alabama Day, Tennessee Day, and Virginia Day. The Cincinnati Tigers had a Bathing Beauty contest, a guaranteed audience increaser, in 1937. (Rogosin, 1983, p. 93) "The teams evolved into a vital component of community building, and a city without a Negro league team was almost by definition a second-rate black community." (Rogosin, 1983, p. 93) Thus, teams brought the black communities together to work on behalf of Civil Rights, to build a better local community, and also to celebrate and acknowledge the achievements of the African Americans themselves.

The black press was another important contributor to black baseball and the Civil Rights movement. Wendell Smith, of the *Pittsburgh Courier*, Sam Lacy, of the *Baltimore Afro-American*, Joe Bostic, of New York's *People's Voice*, were all prominent journalists who crusaded for the advancement of African Americans into the Major Leagues.

Smith interviewed National League players and managers about their attitudes regarding the entry of blacks into the majors. Lacy attended meetings of baseball executives, demanding — and often obtaining — the opportunity for blacks to plead their case. Bostic, a resident of Brooklyn and writer for a Harlem-based weekly, represented a persistent thorn in the side of the three New York teams by leading delegations to their offices and challenging them in his columns. (Tygiel, 1997, p. 36)

After The New York State Quinn-Ives fair employment practices law came into effect in July of 1945, Bostic escorted two Negro Leaguers, David Thomas and Terris McDuffie, to the Brooklyn Dodgers training camp at Bear Mountain and demanded that Branch Rickey hold a tryout for the two ballplayers. Bostic got his tryout, but Rickey already had a plan in motion for black baseball and it did not include those two ballplayers. (Marshall, 1999, p. 124) This incident illustrates how some journalists perceived baseball as a vehicle for integration. They desperately wanted to see the Negro leaguers have an opportunity to prove their abilities to white and black America alike.

Integrating Baseball

Black newspapers were responsible for keeping black communities up-to-date with the Negro Leagues. Not only did they hold the annual ballots for the East-West All Star game every year, they also kept readers up-to-date on the fight for baseball integration. Journalists used their newspapers and magazines as a forum against baseball's ingrained prejudices. They covered the integration story in 1946 very closely.

In fact, Wendell Smith traveled with Jackie Robinson and provided

first-hand reports of his experiences; his "eyewitness accounts boosted *Courier* circulation by 100,000." (Tygiel, 1997, p. 112) Along with these eyewitness stories, the *Courier* also carried a series of editorials on Robinson's activities.

While black newspapers were urging baseball to integrate, the rest of the country was also slowly changing. With blacks being included in the "New Deal relief programs, several Supreme Court decisions limiting discriminatory practices, and a growing exasperation with the South among northern liberals reflected a shift in attitudes. There was a growing militancy among blacks, whom, said Myrdal, 'America can never more regard as a patient, submissive minority.'" (Tygiel, 1997, p. 8) With the exception of Branch Rickey, Bill Veeck, owner of the Cleveland Indians, was the only owner who seemed to understand the situation of African Americans when he wrote in his autobiography:



Jackie Robinson (while still a member of the Kansas City Monarchs)

Most prejudice, I believe, is reducible to basic economics. With the Negroes, there is nothing to take away except their right to make a living. We justify that by saying they are backward, ignorant people — which is a way of saying that they couldn't compete anyway. We push them into slums and we say, smugly, "How can people live like that?" as if they were there by choice. (Veeck, 1962, p. 174)

World War II increased the awareness of African Americans about the need for equal rights. If a black man were good enough to fight for his country, he should be good enough to have the right to a decent and fair living. Although men like Veeck and Rickey attempted to level the playing field for African Americans, it would be naïve to assume it was a completely altruistic idea. Veeck was known for being a great

promoter, and bringing star Negro Leaguers to his team would surely boost the team to stardom, draw large crowds, and create large profits. The majority of owners opposed baseball integration. Their leader was New York Yankee Executive Larry MacPhail.

In a 1946 report, given for a Major League steering Committee meeting formed to protect baseball's reserve clause, Larry MacPhail expressed his objections to integrating baseball. He claimed that, "American people are primarily concerned with the excellence of performance in sport rather than the color, race or creed of the performers." (MacPhail, 1946, p. 18) His main point was that baseball was a private enterprise, and that both black and white baseball were thriving as two separate leagues. He accused those pushing for an integrated league of "not campaigning to provide a better opportunity for thousands of Negro boys who want to play baseball," or even for "improving the lot of Negro players who are already employed." (MacPhail, 1946, p. 18) Rather, he believed they were attacking segregated baseball because it provided "a good publicity medium." (MacPhail, 1946, p. 18) He tried to justify the segregation of top athletes by reducing it to business strategy and ethics.

MacPhail went on to express his concern for the quality of the Major League franchise if it were to integrate:

The employment of a Negro on one AAA League Club in 1946 resulted in a tremendous increase in Negro attendance at all games in which the player appeared. The percentage of Negro attendance at some games at Newark and Baltimore was in excess of 50%. A situation might be presented, if Negroes participate in Major League games, in which the preponderance of Negro attendance in parks such as the Yankee Stadium, the Polo Grounds and Comiskey Park could conceivably threaten the value of the Major League franchises owned by these Clubs. (MacPhail, 1946, p. 18)

His theory was that integrating baseball would draw too many African Americans to the stands. Former Baseball Commissioner and National League President Ford Frick bluntly explained, "They were afraid of upsetting the status quo, afraid of alienating the white clientele that largely supported the professional game." (Tygiel, 1997, p. 34) The issue for MacPhail and other owners was not with the players, but rather with the fans they would attract to the stadium, the unwanted African American.

Unlike Veeck, who felt that black major leagu-



Kansas City Monarchs, 1945

ers would increase his profits, MacPhail pointed out that "few good young Negro players are being developed," and that "many major and minor league clubs derive substantial revenue from [stadium] rentals." (MacPhail, 1946, p. 18) He found it ridiculous to integrate baseball and extinguish the Negro Leagues so a few talented Negro leaguers could play in the Major Leagues. He argued persuasively that:

These Negro leagues cannot exist without good players. If they cannot field good teams, they will not continue to attract the fans who click the turnstiles. Continued prosperity depends upon improving standards of play. If the major leagues and big minors of Professional Baseball raid these leagues and take their best players — the Negro leagues will eventually fold up — the investments of the club owners will be wiped out — and a lot of professional Negro players will lose their jobs. (MacPhail, 1946, p. 19)

He believed integration would prove disastrous for both the Negro and Major Leagues. The Negro Leagues would cease to exist; thus, the Major Leagues would lose the revenue acquired from renting to these teams, but more importantly they would gain an unwanted crowd that could possibly drive out their current clientele.

Even with such substantial objections, MacPhail's plea would not be enough to stop integration. The integration of the country's national pastime was bigger than the business of baseball; it was the foreshadowing of an America yet to come. When Branch Rickey signed Jackie Robinson in late 1945, his motives for integrating baseball, like Veeck's, were somewhat skewed. Tygiel recorded a story about Rickey claiming that he was first motivated to integrate sports in 1904 while coaching at Ohio Wesleyan. One of the athletes on his Ohio team was a young black man named Charlie Thomas. When the team traveled to Notre Dame, the hotel they stayed at refused to provide lodging for Thomas. Rickey then had it arranged for Thomas to sleep on a cot, like a black servant, in Rickey's room. "That night Thomas wept and rubbed his hands as if trying to rub off the color. 'Black skin! Black skin!' he said to Rickey. 'If

I could only make them white.” (Tygiel, 1997, p. 51-52) Rickey claimed that night haunted him and ever since then he had done whatever he could to prevent similar events from transpiring. Rickey’s liberal stance on baseball integration does not square with the way he approached the recruitment of the Negro Leaguers nor the way he dealt with the Negro League owners.

Like Veeck, Rickey was interested in winning ball games. “The Negro will make us winners for years to come,” noted Rickey, “and for that I will happily bear being a bleeding heart, and a do-gooder, and all that humanitarian rot.” (Marshall, 1999, p. 123) His success and the success of his ball club were his primary concerns. Branch Rickey never intended to incorporate the owners or the Negro Leagues into the Major League baseball system. He merely wanted to absorb their best players for his own organization; never mind what the consequences would be for the Negro Leagues. In fact, Rickey criticized the Negro Leagues constantly. The *Pittsburgh Courier* recorded Rickey as claiming, “they are not leagues and have no right to expect organized baseball to respect them.” (*Pittsburgh Courier*, 1945) Rickey described them as “rackets” and suggested “they were not on the up and up.” (Loverro, 2003, p. 298) Instead of working with Negro League owners, Rickey started his own Negro league, the United States League, in 1945. It was a subterfuge by Rickey, intended to provide him with a monopoly over the pool of black athletes available for the Major Leagues.

Effa Manley confessed that the Negro League owners knew integration was coming and had in fact discussed which baseball player should sign first: “We could see the handwriting on the wall. And we had decided that if they asked us who to break down the prejudice in the majors, Monte [Irvin] would have been the boy.” (Manley Interview, 1977) The Negro League owners wanted to see their ball players succeed in the Major Leagues, but they did not want to see their ball clubs go under because of that success. Some Negro League owners fostered false hope for integration proving to be a positive step for their ball clubs. They hoped that “perhaps the Negro circuits might be incorporated into organized baseball as minor leagues which developed talent and then sold players to the majors. The possibility of working agreements with specific big league clubs was also suggested.” (Tygiel, 1997, p. 89) In reality, however, “if the Negro ballplayers had a chance in organized baseball the Negro League would be forced out of business. For organized baseball the admission of Robinson heralded a new age; for black baseball it marked the dawn of destruction.” (Tygiel, 1997, p. 86)

After Rickey signed Robinson and chose not to compensate his old team, the Kansas City Monarchs, hope for salvaging the existing Negro Leagues vanished.

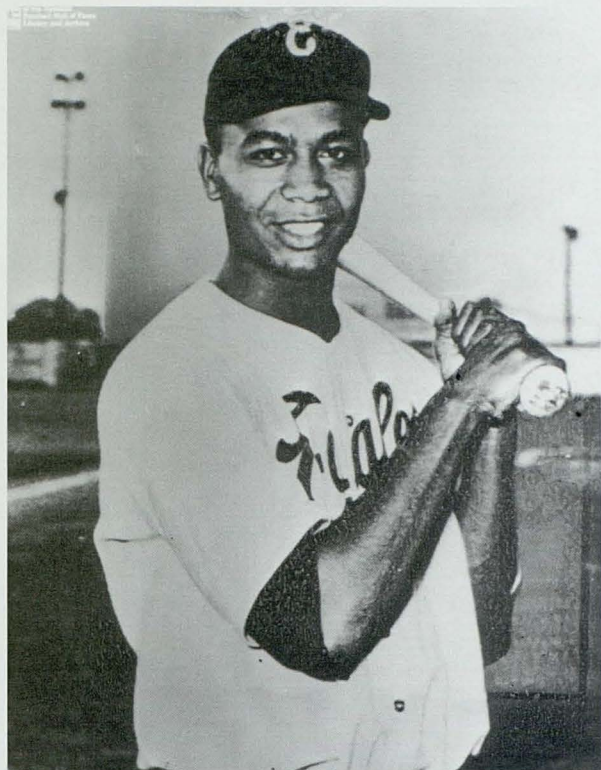
In 1946, Jackie Robinson told Branch Rickey that he had nothing more than a handshake binding him to the Kansas City club. (Tygiel, 1997, p. 87) With no proper legal documentation, Rickey knew there was nothing the Negro League owners could do to stop him from taking their players without compensation. As baseball would continue to integrate, the Major Leagues consumed all the great black athletes from the Negro Leagues.

Once, when an owner who had lost his player to a Major League team made an objection, the *Chicago Defender* published a letter that described the Negro League owners “as selfish as any plantation owner of the slavery bound men in the days prior to the Civil War.” (Tygiel, 1997, p. 88) After the Negro League owners went to Chandler to ask for incorporation of the leagues, Wendell Smith wrote, “All they cared about was the perpetuation of the slave trade they had developed.” (Tygiel, 1997, p. 90) If any Negro League owners tried to object, they were immediately accused of trying to stand in the way of integration for their own personal gain. What these writers and fans failed to see was that these Negro League clubs had invested time and money. These leagues were their livelihood. At the very least, they wanted compensation for the loss of their players and clubs. But, in the end, there was nothing the owners could do. Effa Manley summed it up best: “We were in no position to protest and he (Rickey) knew it. He had us over a barrel in a way. The fans would never forgive us plus it would have been wrong to have prevented the players from going to the major leagues.” (Tygiel, 1997, p. 88) It was a no win situation for the owners. There seemed to be no visible way for integration to occur and the Negro Leagues to continue.

Bill Veeck and his negotiation with Effa Manley for Larry Doby was the closest thing to compensation the Negro Leagues would see for their players. In his autobiography, Veeck wrote:

I had always felt that Mr. Rickey had been wrong in taking Jackie Robinson from a Negro club without paying for him. Contract or no, the owner of a Negro club could not possibly refuse to let a player go to the major leagues. It meant too much to the whole race. For anyone to take advantage of that situation, particularly while talking about equal rights, was terribly unfair. (Veeck, 1962, p. 176)

Bill Veeck recorded that he paid \$20,000 for Doby. (Veeck, 1962, p. 176) Following this transaction, a lot of Major League teams began to purchase the best athletes from the Negro Leagues for a mere five thousand dollars, something Effa Manley described as a “bargain basement rush.” (Veeck, 1962, p. 176) To illustrate her complaint, Tygiel uses this example: “In 1948 Cleveland Buckeye owner Ernie Wright, desperately in need of operating capital, sold [Sam] Jethroe, his leading attraction, to Branch Rickey’s Dodgers for \$5000. Two years later Rickey received a figure in excess of \$100,000 for Jethroe from the Boston Braves.” (Veeck, 1962, p. 176) Veeck’s earlier observations were correct. Major League teams were taking advantage of the precarious position occupied by Negro ball clubs. On one hand, they were advancing black athletes, but



Larry Doby (while still a member of the Newark Eagles)

on the other, they were crushing the business of black baseball, a business that was much more than baseball.

The End of the Negro Leagues

Fault for the collapse of the Negro Leagues does not lie entirely on the shoulders of the Major Leagues. Mrs. Manley explained, "The fans deserted us to go see the boys on the white teams. Deserted us like they say rats desert a ship." (Manley Interview, 1977) In an article in *The Sporting News*, Mrs. Manley elaborated:

The livelihoods, the careers, the families of 400 Negro ball players are in jeopardy because four players have been successful in getting into the major leagues. The Negro fan would rather watch Doby, Robinson, Campanella and Paige than a Negro league game any time. If the Negro fan cannot see the four players, he will try to get where there is television. If no television, he will try to get a radio story about them. In any event, the publicity in Negro baseball has been concentrated on the four successful players. And Negro league baseball cannot break into publicity sources. (*Sporting News*, 1948)

What happened to the Negro Leagues was inevitable. The integration of baseball was about more than blacks merely being allowed to play professional ball. Jackie Robinson represented the entire black population when he crossed into the Major Leagues. His success was their success.

To illustrate the point that Robinson represented more than simply the integration of baseball, consider the following responses from black journalists:

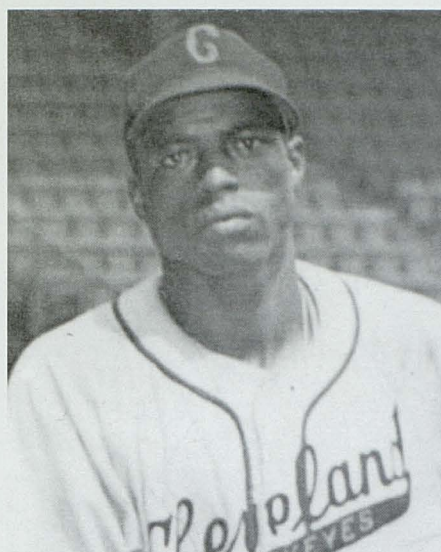
"'Alone, Robinson represented a weapon far more potent than the combined forces of all our liberal legislation,' contended Lacy. 'Robinson,' observed Wendell Smith, 'has the hopes, aspirations and ambitions of thirteen million black Americans heaped upon his broad, sturdy shoulders.'" (Tygiel, 1997, p. 75)

In the eyes of millions of blacks throughout America, Robinson personally represented each and every one of them. For the first time since 1889, there was no denying the ability, the equality, and the prowess of the black athlete in baseball, America's national pastime. Blacks showed their support for Robinson repeatedly. "Large numbers of blacks flooded International League ball parks wherever Robinson appeared. In Buffalo and Baltimore, blacks consistently accounted for between 40 and 50 percent of the throngs who massed at the playing field." (Tygiel, 1997, p. 130) Robinson would succeed and blacks would continue to integrate into baseball. They broke down barriers, set new records, and, for the first time, created a strong sense of self-pride in black America. It was a foreshadowing of things to come.

As for the Negro Leagues, the National League folded after its 1948 season and the American League struggled until it came to a pathetic end in 1960. The final East-West All-Star Game at Comiskey Park showcased only four teams and netted only five thousand dollars. (Tygiel, 1997, p. 302) This event, which was once the highlight of celebrated seasons, became a sideshow to the Major Leagues. The great black empire shriveled up and disappeared. Never again would so many blacks be part of professional baseball. Foster's biggest fear had come true; whites absorbed and demolished his dream. Black baseball no longer belonged to black owners or black fans. The cultural entity no longer existed. What was once a positive rallying force within the black community was no longer in operation.

Conclusion

The Negro Leagues, however, while in operation through those Jim Crow years, served as a very positive influence for a destitute community. Prejudice and segregation forced African Americans into economic poverty. There was little or no opportunity for even educated black men to succeed economically. Wendell Smith pointed out in a sarcastic rebuttal, "a lot of the fabulously 'rich' colored garbage collectors hold degrees from the 'big' colored college, but can't get anything better because the South is progressing so rapidly." (Tygiel, 1997, p. 113) One of the only legitimate businesses completely run by blacks was liquor stores. Many blacks worked in manufacturing and service type jobs with no real future or promising income. They often turned to the "numbers" bankers. While their activities were illegal, they were economically vital and important to the black communities. Forced into these illegal occupations, "numbers" bankers would use their money to form a very significant and influential part of black society, the Negro Leagues. These



Sam Jethro (while still a member of the Cleveland Buckeyes)

leagues provided a legitimate black profession and in the process found ways to give back to the community. From an impoverished beginning, black baseball would rise to be worth two million dollars before its dismal collapse.

In its time of existence, black baseball added a third tier of professionalism to the already existing professional spheres of teachers and ministers. "The combination of athletic fame and exotic reputation of someone who traveled a lot made the players 'models of excellence and achievement in communities where few rose above the mundane.'"

(Overmyer, 1998, p. 65) Baseball gave black youth something to strive for and gave others a model to emulate, or at least, an opportunity to have a sense of pride in their own race.

Black baseball operated as a tool to push for Civil Rights. Game days promoted certain issues and brought the community together. Fundraisers were common for local charities and for the NAACP throughout each season. To be sitting, surrounded by a multitude of other black baseball fans, in a stadium, watching black athletes perform magnificent feats on the field, had to bring a sense of unity and pride only equaled inside churches or schools. The Negro Leagues provided an arena of unity where blacks could witness and take pride in their race's accomplishments on and off the field. In 1934, while at the annual East-West All-Star game, William G. Nunn, the city editor of the *Pittsburgh Courier*, wrote a testimonial to the pride black baseball had given him:

They made me proud that I'm a Negro, and tonight I am singing a new song! For under the flood lights of this memorable field, with the famous "sky-ride" of the Chicago World Fair overhead ... and with a perfect harvest moon riding majestically in the heavens, the Afro-American pageant, "O Sing a New Song" unfolded in a blaze of simple glory, which gave to some 40,000 onlookers a different conception of the trials, tribulations and triumphs of a great and glorious race. (Overmyer, 1998, pp. 31-32)

Baseball was truly more than a game and more than a profit. It brought a community together and instilled a sense of pride. Baseball was a celebration of a culture that had persevered through many hardships and was still fighting. It was a rallying point for the Civil Rights Movement.

After integration, this attention shifted from the Negro Leagues to the Major Leagues. Here they watched talented men like Robinson and Doby take on their white counterparts in the white man's most popular game. Their success meant acknowledgement from both black and white communities that blacks were capable and equal, if not superior, to their

opponents. It was a huge step for the black man in America, and everyone watched with great anticipation as these athletes graced Major League stadiums. It would not be long before the rest of the world would know what the black communities had known for a very long time: that baseball itself suffered from not allowing black athletes to take part in its games. Black athletes broke records and amazed baseball fans everywhere with their abilities. On and off the field, their appearance and success provided a psychological advancement for blacks. There was a strong sense of pride and confidence that came with breaking down barriers.

None of this esteem, or self pride, would have formed so blatantly had it not been for the Negro Leagues and the long history of black baseball that preceded integration. Men such as Rube Foster, who had a dream of an all black league that could escape the prejudices of white men, are responsible for keeping baseball alive in black communities. He realized the ability of his race, and he refused to sit by idly and see this talent wasted because the white man cast him out of organized ball. It was a long and hard path, but, because of the endurance and strength of men such as John Henry Lloyd, Josh Gibson, and so many more, baseball, as a vehicle, eventually played a prominent role in the integration of America. Had it not been for these men and the Negro Leagues, it is possible that when the time came to integrate there would not have been any black athletes capable of such a task.

The irony of the Negro Leagues is that when they reached their peak, they were no longer under black control — just when the East-West game was at its



The New York Cubans versus the Homestead Grays.



Washington Homestead Grays

apex, black baseball was profitable, and an assured black fan base existed, white owners took an interest and stole black baseball. Regardless of the objections from both sides, integration was simply inevitable. The talent black athletes offered Major League clubs and the strong advocacy by equal rights activists were ultimately the driving forces behind the integration of baseball. Robinson's integration was the dawn of a new America for African Americans. The fight to integrate saw its first true victory in baseball.

It is only right to evaluate the sacrifices made in the name of social advancements and integration. What happened to black baseball is something of a paradox. Integration meant blacks were finally recognized and given an opportunity to succeed in mainstream America. But, it also meant black owners lost their businesses, the majority of black baseball players lost their jobs and status as professionals in society, and the black communities lost an organization that was beneficial and important to their own specific needs and causes. Nevertheless, the most astonishing part of the integration of baseball is the history of black baseball leading up to integration. It is a story of a people who pulled themselves up by their bootstraps. Cast aside and given nothing, they managed to build a prosperous business that benefited the entire black community. The legacy of black baseball is a legacy of African American struggle and success and struggle, again.

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